

FITNESS TO STUDY POLICY: POSTGRADUATE

Introduction

1. The University is committed to supporting student wellbeing, takes a positive attitude to students' physical and mental health, and recognises that the wellbeing of students is critical to their learning, academic achievement, and their wider student experience.

General Principles

2. The Fitness to Study Policy: Postgraduate is designed to recognise and support students who are not able to participate fully and successfully in their academic studies, and life generally, at the University by providing a consistent and coordinated approach to the management of their individual situation.
3. The Fitness to Study Policy: Postgraduate is to be used when:
 - a. students are not able to progress as a student at the level and intensity of study required in a normal credit load or;
 - b. students are not able to continue as a student at the level and intensity despite adjustments and support mechanisms having been put in place or;
 - c. when a student is returning to study following a break enforced by the Fitness to Study Policy: Postgraduate.
4. The University has a duty of care to respond appropriately to situations where there are concerns relating to visible signs of physical or mental illness or personal difficulties that have a detrimental impact on the functioning of the individual student and/or other members of the University community. This may arise where, for example, the University is concerned that:
 - a. a student has a sudden decrease in academic attainment;
 - b. a student's attendance and/or engagement is not at the expected level (see Attendance Policy);
 - c. a student's ability to study is neither manageable nor achievable in relation to specific tasks and/or activities;
 - d. a student is repeatedly missing deadlines, not submitting assessments, and/or not taking assessments and final exams in the scheduled timetable;
 - e. a Programme Director, faculty, or other member of staff becomes increasingly concerned about a student's attainment and/or behaviour;

- f. a student poses a risk to his/her own health, safety and/or wellbeing and/or that of other persons;
 - g. the student's behaviour is, or is at risk of, negatively affecting the teaching, learning and/or experience of other students;
 - h. the student's behaviour is or is at risk of negatively affecting the day-to-day activities of the University and/or a placement provider.
5. There are two levels to the Fitness to Study procedure:
- Level 1: Initial concerns, developing a Fitness to Study Progress Plan •
 - Level 2: Serious concerns
6. Normally, students will enter Fitness to Study at Level 1, but they may be entered at either level, without any requirement for Level 1 to have been commenced or exhausted. At which level the Fitness to Study is implemented will depend on factors such as the nature of the concern, the seriousness of the academic risk, the student's perception of their behaviour, and the response of the student to any steps taken by the University to manage the situation.

Level 1 – Initial Concerns, Developing a Progress Plan

- 7. If a student is showing cause for concern and is not engaging with the University support services already in place, the Student Case Officer will notify the student to arrange a meeting to explain that there is a concern about their Fitness to Study, the nature of that concern, and that the matter is to be managed under this policy.
- 8. The aim of the meeting will be to discuss the concern, any support needs the student may have, and will seek to identify the student's perception of the concern. The student will be informed who will be present at the meeting and will be reminded that they may bring someone with them for support.
- 9. The Student Case Officer will determine whether the student's Fitness to Study is impaired, or may become impaired, and any actions to be taken. The meeting will typically cover:
 - a. new or additional support arrangements and/or reasonable adjustments to be put in place for the student within the University's provision;
 - b. additional support arrangements that the student may need to engage external to the University;
 - c. documentation of physical or mental illness or personal difficulties;
 - d. referring the student to Student Affairs, or other relevant members of staff, for additional support;
 - e. a Progress Plan to be drawn up with the agreement of the student, setting out how the matter will be managed by the student and the University;
 - f. referral to Level 2.

10. The student should be encouraged to provide suggestions which may lead to improvement and to identify a support network.
11. The student will be informed that if he or she does not engage with the Progress Plan, the case may be referred to be dealt with at Level 2 of this Procedure.
12. A date will be arranged at which the student's Progress Plan will be reviewed and a decision taken on whether the Progress Plan should continue and, if so, whether it should be amended, and whether any requirements have been complied with and, if not, whether the matter should be referred to Level 2.
13. If a student does not attend a Fitness to Study meeting or is repeatedly cancelling, it will be treated as a lack of engagement with the Progress Plan. Whilst the University will accommodate phone calls where necessary, the University recognises the benefit of an in-person meeting with a student in order to assess signs of general wellbeing.

Level 2 – Serious Concerns

14. If a student is struggling without signs of improvement or is not engaging with the Progress Plan, the Student Case Officer will notify the student that there is a concern about their Fitness to Study, the nature of that concern, and that the matter is to be referred by the Academic Progress Committee.
15. At Level 2, the Academic Progress Committee will review the circumstances of the matter (for example, the seriousness of the concern, the risk posed, and whether the student is able to engage with the process) and rule on the student's progression.
16. The committee actions may include, but are not limited to, one or more of the following outcomes:
 - a. the matter referred to Level 1;
 - b. student is informed of academic probation if their GPA is below 2.0;
 - c. the student to further reduce credit load;
 - d. recommendation to the student that they take a leave of absence for up to two semesters;
 - e. a hold on registration may be imposed with a set of conditions for return;
 - f. a recommendation to the University Exam Board for academic dismissal.
17. A registration hold is when the student is not permitted to register for a set period of time.

18. The student will be notified in writing of the decision in a Fitness to Study decision letter and outcome of the meeting with reasons, normally within five working days. The decision letter will set-out the deadlines by which any conditions need to be met.
19. The appeals route is via the Provost Office.

Leave of Absence

20. When a student requests a Leave of Absence (LoA) associated with physical or mental illness or personal difficulties, they may be allowed to resume their studies once the University is satisfied that they are medically fit to do so, as certified by an appropriate, qualified medical practitioner or mental health practitioner, and that there is appropriate medical, educational, and pastoral provision to support them.
21. The University will inform the student of any visa and financial implications of the LoA. Please see the Leave of Absence Policy.
22. The APC will decide on the students return after reviewing all of the above information.

Registration Holds

22. The University may place a student on a registration hold due to academic insufficiency or behavioural issues associated with physical or mental illness or personal difficulties. The student may be allowed to resume their studies once the University is satisfied that they are medically fit to do so, as certified by an appropriate, qualified medical practitioner or mental health practitioner, and that there is appropriate medical, educational, and pastoral provision to support them.
23. If a student is put on a registration hold their return will be subject to the conditions set out in the Fitness to Study decision letter and the APC's approval. This is for severe cases so the APC is responsible for approving a return.
24. The University will inform the student of any visa and financial implications of the registration hold.

Returning to Study

24. A request to return to study (following a Leave of Absence or Registration Hold) must be made by the student completing the Return to Study form and sending it to Registry Services by the time indicated in their Fitness to Study decision letter. The time away from the University will normally be up to two semesters.

25. The student will normally be invited to discuss their return with the Student Case Officer, their Programme Director, and a member of Student Affairs, and together they will agree a revised Progress Plan.
26. If the student was on academic probation before their leave, they will return on probation as in the Academic Standing, Progression and Dismissal Policy.

Non- Returners

27. There are times that the student may not be re-enrolled after being on a Leave of Absence or registration hold. APC may determine that:
 - a. the student did not fulfil their conditions, but has more time to do so, and will be asked to request their return at a later date;
 - b. the student did not fulfil their conditions within two semesters, but is showing progress, and may be exceptionally permitted one additional semester to meet the conditions;
 - c. The student did not fulfil their conditions and will be requested to complete an official withdrawal or will be unofficially withdrawn from the University;
 - d. If a student does not correspond by the set time, they will be treated as if they did not fulfil their conditions, and they will be unofficially withdrawn from the University.
28. If the student is withdrawn from the University and has a GPA below 2.0, they are not eligible for readmission.
29. If the student is withdrawn from the University, has a GPA above 2.0, and wishes to come back to complete requirements, they must apply for readmission. The student is governed by the degree requirements in effect at the time of readmission.
30. It is the aim of the Fitness to Study procedure that all decisions are made with the student, and with their best interests in mind. If the student is unhappy with a decision made based on this policy, they should first discuss this informally with the Student Case Officer or their Programme Director.

Confidentiality

31. The Policy is in line with the University's Privacy Policy.
32. If the student has any questions on how their information will be used, this will be discussed in the Fitness to Study meeting. They will be encouraged to read and understand the Privacy Policy's section on sensitive information.

VERSION MANAGEMENT

Responsible Department: Registry Services			
Approving body: Academic Board			
Edition no.	Key Changes	Date of approval	Date of effect
001		23 July 2021	27 August 2021
002	Removed header and hyperlinks	18 October 2022	18 October 2022
003	Updated minimum GPA for good academic standing	June 2023	Sep 2023
		Restricted access? <i>Tick as appropriate</i> ☐ Yes ☒ No	